**The Age of Enlightenment and Romanticism**

We have classified the **Scientific Revolution** as a movement involving a great number of people over a relatively long period of time, but such movements do not occur unless there is a consensus, a view shared by the majority of people of the time. The view that was shared by many Europeans, although certainly not all, during the period from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries was that the universe was governed by natural law, a set of physical laws that could be discovered by the use of reason even if those laws could not be changed. With every new discovery, the number of people sharing that view increased and their desire to learn even more about the physical world grew. Moreover, many people concluded that natural laws governed human affairs and, if humans could discover those laws, they could act in accordance with them and create an orderly, equitable, and prosperous society. The period during which these ideas dominated European thought is usually called **The Age of Enlightenment** or, using a term made famous by Tom Paine, **The Age of Reason**". It was an era in which the Realist point of view prevailed, although those people who shared this view are called **Rationalists** rather than Realists.

Naturally enough, organized religion opposed this viewpoint and upheld the traditional Christian belief that the universe and everything that happened in it was an expression of God's will. When ecclesiastical (church) power was strong enough, the speculations of the natural philosophers were limited by force, and prominent advocates of the use of reason such as **Roger Bacon, Galileo, Rousseau, and Voltaire** often faced prison, exile, or even the possibility of death for publishing their beliefs. By 1525, however, the universal Church of the Middle Ages had disintegrated in the Protestant Reformation, and there was no unified Christian authority to curb the rationalists. It was perhaps only natural that the rationalists came to view established religion as an opponent of free speech, free inquiry, and free thought. Moreover, they rejected the contention of the varieties of religion of the time to be the possessors of knowledge that could not be known by reason but only because it had been revealed to humanity by God. They rejected revealed knowledge! Many of the natural philosophers increasingly became convinced that the entire universe and its workings could be explained by natural law and that natural law could be discovered through reason. Some of the artists and philosophers of the time portrayed the universe as operating like the works of a perfect clock, and some historians have called this view **The Clockwork Universe, or Deism**. While they were willing to believe that some creator had to have constructed the clock and set it working, they believed that it now ran without the intervention or tinkering of its creator. In short, they may have believed in God, but did not believe that God intervened in human affairs, punished the wicked, answered prayers, protected the innocent or did any of the other things that traditional Christianity taught that the Deity did. Such people were called deists, and **Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson**, and many other eminent men and women of the time shared this view of things.

Turning to matters of politics, the rationalists denied the prevailing view that the forms of government had somehow been instituted among men by God and it was the Christian's duty "to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's...." The historians among them noted that, throughout history, governments supposedly instituted by God or the gods had always worked for the benefit of the powerful few at the expense of the obedient many. Meanwhile, the travelers among them reported that, despite the great differences among the peoples of the Earth, their basic principles of justice and equity were quite similar regardless of their religion. Based upon these and other considerations, they deduced that the **Natural Laws** governing human communities were that the power of the law and the legitimacy of the government was derived only from the consent of the community as a whole. In addition, they held that the proper function of government was to interfere with the individual as little as possible while still protecting his natural rights to life and liberty.

Moreover, they concluded that every individual had the natural right to try to acquire property, meaning by this that every individual had the right to attempt to gain ownership of some means of production, whether it be a farm, factory, or the tools of a trade. In the American **Declaration of Independence** of 1776, Thomas Jefferson carried these natural rights to their logical conclusion by saying that the people should rebel against any government that failed to act in accordance with those principles. The economic significance of that position was obvious. Any government that tried to protect the property of a favored class at the expense of others had no right to continued existence. That view was expressed in greater detail by **Adam Smith**. In ***The Wealth of Nations***, Smith argued that, if left alone, people would behave rationally and try to acquire property. The only way of acquiring property, Smith held, was by making it or taking it from someone else. Since no one could be satisfied simply by taking from each other, men would naturally turn to the creation of property. This, in turn, would increase the total production of goods to the benefit of all.

The idea that human beings were governed by the same laws as governed the course of the stars and planets, and that by observing those same laws human communities could move with the same order and regularity as the heavens was an intriguing one. And so the era was one of governmental reform. In Europe, the rationalists believed that the best form of government was that governed by a powerful but "enlightened" monarch; in England, the tendency was to create a body of principles, a constitution (Great Britain has no written constitution), embodying those expressions of natural law that the monarch was to follow; and the British colonists in North America formed a representative democracy in which the representatives of the people were limited by a written body of principles.

The idea that humans could use their reason to discover and institute perfect societies was, as we noted, beguiling. So beguiling, in fact, that people continued to believe through three centuries of increasingly savage and destructive wars that they were making progress. Many of the societies they established or influenced were not much different than those of the past. The privileged and powerful still ruled and the masses still had little chance to better themselves. Perhaps they were, in a way, ever more repressive than those of earlier days. Dissidents, eccentrics, and anyone else who opposed the existing order could be, and were, considered as behaving irrationally and a threat to "public order". The Protestant churches, wherever they managed to establish themselves, proved to be just as repressive as the old universal Church had been, and both Catholic and Protestant Churches were led by the threat of each other to adopt even more restrictive policies than had hitherto been the case.

The Age of Enlightenment began to end with the great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755. Certainly there had been such disasters before, but this one was so sudden and destructive that it made dramatic news throughout Europe and caused many people to begin to wonder about natural law that could govern the planets is their steady and mathematical course and could also include sudden and unexplainable calamities. It began to see as if natural law provided no assurance of order or of permanence. (Voltaire’s ***Candide***.)

The effect of this event has been memorialized in **Oliver Wendell Holmes's** (1809- 1894) poem entitled "*The Deacon's Masterpiece",* but better known as *The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay*. In this poem, Holmes describes a seventeenth- century deacon who set out to make a perfect one-horse carriage. He chose every piece with the utmost care and had the carriage built so that there was no weak point anywhere in its design. He did his work so well that the carriage outlasted him by many years. Exactly one hundred years later, the owner was riding in this carriage when it suddenly fell apart into a pile of dust. No single part of it had been weak, and so it had all broken at the same time. The day that this happened was, of course, 1 November 1755 -- the day of the Lisbon Earthquake. Holmes concluded the poem with the lines "End of the wonderful one-hoss shay/ Logic is logic. That's all I say". The point was that a perfect rational argument is like a balloon. If any one point fails, the entire argument fails, and many people believe that the Lisbon Earthquake was the point at which the argument upon which the Age of Reason was constructed failed.

This was much after the fact, however. The short novel Candide by Voltaire (1694-1778), published in 1759, perhaps had more influence at the time. The protagonist of the novel, Candide, is a naive young man who is thrown out into the world and wanders through all of its savagery, often in the company of his old tutor, Doctor Pangloss, who has convinced himself by rational demonstration that "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." Candide comes to believe that "Optimism is a mania for maintaining that all is well when things are going badly." After a long series of encounters with cruelty hypocrisy, stupidity, and every other form of human viciousness, Candide retires to a small plot of land to cultivate and on which to stay as far from idealists as possible. [Incidentally, Leonard Bernstein composed a delightful opera on the theme of Candide that you should hear if you get the opportunity.]

Candide pointed unerringly to the great defect in the idealism of The Age of Enlightenment. Even if the universe were governed by natural law on the basis of which humans might live in perfect peace and harmony, the fact of the matter is that human beings do not always behave rationally. It would seem that, in many if not most human beings, passions, personal desires, and just downright silliness often prevail over the exercise of reason. We are quite capable of thinking one way and then acting in quite a different, and often irrational, way.

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778) was one of the outstanding figures of the Enlightenment and a quite despicable man. He extolled the virtues of family life but slept with his servant girl for some twenty-three years before getting around to marrying her. His novel ***Emile*** set forth most of the principles of child-rearing that we observe today -- that parents should teach by example rather than through punishment, that children pass through stages of development and should not be forced to behave in manners of which they are not capable, that children should be given time in the sun to laugh and play, that children should be loved. Every time his girl had one of his children, however, he had her leave it at a foundling home but continued to draw the charity milk and bread given to new mothers. He enjoyed a nice bowl of bread and milk. Even though his actions were reprehensible, we should admire his ideals since they were the ideals upon which Thomas Jefferson drew in penning the Declaration of Independence. Even Thomas Jefferson had a long love affair with one of his many slaves.

Then, too, there was a spirit of rebellion in the air. People, especially young people, were less willing to accept the conformity and repression of individuality that Enlightenment society required of its members, colonists were less willing to accept their continual exploitation in the interests of the mother country, ethnic minorities were less willing to subject themselves to attempts to absorb them into the majority culture, workers and peasants were less willing to admit the superiority of groups claiming special rights by the laws of nature, travelers were less impressed by the accuracy and symmetry of gardens such as those at Versailles, composers were less willing to construct intricate works on the basis of the mathematical models that had guided Bach and **Mozart**, and people in general were less willing to accept an ideal of society that seem to value mediocrity. By the close of the eighteenth century, Europe was entering a new era. In literature and music, it is called The Age of Romanticism and was ushered in by **Goethe** and **Beethoven**; in government, it is called **The Age of Revolution**, and witnessed a wave of colonial rebellions that swept away the old sea-borne empires; and in politics generally, it is called **The Age of Liberalism**, and gave rise to the French Revolution and the twelve years in which **Napoleon Bonaparte** dominated Europe and swept away many of the last remnants of the old and discredited regimes of the Enlightenment.

**After reading the document, please write excellent answers these questions ON NOTEBOOK PAPER!! Give the work you completed to Mr. Tomevi at the end of the period. Please make sure your name is on the paper!!**

1. The Age of Enlightenment, The Age of Reason, Realists, Rationalists, are all names that embody what main idea?

2. Why do you think these folks, Realists or Rationalists, were so eager to learn more about the Universe once they accepted it was knowable?

3. Why did the followers of Church doctrine tend to reject this new Rationalism or Enlightenment?

4. How did the Church at first attempt to deal with the rise of these new thinking men?

5. What significant historical event of the era prevented the Church from stopping the flow of new and to them heretical ideas as easily as it had in the past?

6. What was “revealed knowledge” and who used that concept to defend its claimed position as the keeper of truthful knowledge?

7. In your own words, what was the concept of God according to Deism? What were the unusual characteristics of the Deist God?

8. What is meant by the phrase taken from the Bible, “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s”? In the conflict between the Rationalists and the Church, who used that argument and to what purpose?

9. How did Rationalists counter the “render unto Caesar” argument?

10. The phrase, “the legitimacy of the government was derived only from the consent of the community as a whole” is clearly and expression of what form of government?

11. Explain the meaning of this old saying, “The government that governs best, governs least.”

12. Along these liens of thought, Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence puts forth the idea that every man has which natural right?

13. Why might some people feel this phrase from the document is explosive in its meaning; “Any government that tried to protect the property of a favored class at the expense of others had no right to continued existence.”

14. In the book Wealth of Nations, according to the author Adam Smith, man can acquire property in only two ways. Smith makes what optimistic assumption about the nature of man in his choice of ways to pursue wealth?

15. How did governmental reform fit into the logic of the Rationalist argument?

16. The document goes on to say that despite the optimism and hope of the Rationalists, the actual results of many of the Rationalist ideas over the years had what kind of overall impact on the societies which tried to implement those ideas?

17. What physical world event occurred which more or less signaled the beginning of the end of the Enlightenment?

18. What about that event caused people to question some of the ideas of the Enlightenment?